



United States Army Recruiting Command

310 W. Wisconsin Avenue, Suite 600 Milwaukee, WI 53203-2211

COMMITTED TO SERVE

Corey and Jason Baumgardner are brothers and they've joined the Army. Corey and Jason know what they want and where they belong. But, they won't be heading there together.

In July 2002, both brothers signed special forces contracts with the intention of realizing their goal of becoming two of the Army's best. They hoped to find that extra bit of strength and support by completing the training with their best friend by their side. And, it was just days before their October ship date when they learned that Jason's LASIK eye surgery he'd had years before would drastically change their plans. Ultimately, in what could have been a story of disappointment and a loss of two contracts for the Milwaukee Recruiting Battalion, Corey and Jason demonstrated why they belong among the best.

Jason, Age 29

Jason had always considered the military as an option. "High school friends were surprised I didn't enlist right out of high school," commented Jason. "I had always thought of the military as a good place to challenge myself." Following graduation from high school in Corey and Jason's hometown of Menomonie, Wisconsin, he completed a bachelor's degree in criminal justice at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. He became a police officer and, prior to enlisting in the Army, he served the City of West Allis, a suburb of Milwaukee. Speaking of his ability to adapt to military life, Jason said, "I have pretty much spent my whole life in one sort of uniform or another . . . hockey, jujutsu, police . . . when you wear a uniform you are part of a team, something bigger than yourself. I think I just naturally gravitate toward that."

Resigned from his position with the police department, personal items in storage, goodbyes completed, Jason received the bad news five days from his and his brother's departure. Jason's corrected 20/20 vision would make special forces an unattainable goal. "Jason is an individual that I firmly believe the Army could do nothing but benefit by," said Corey of his older brother. Corey went on to explain Jason's training as an EMT and his interest in Jujutsu, in which he holds a black belt and instructs others. Holding Jason back was a recent Army directive which prohibited him from seeking a special forces MOS because of the LASIK surgery.

Now it was time for Jason and Corey to consider their options.

Corey, Age 25

Corey, in contrast to his older brother, had never given much serious consideration to the military. "I didn't understand the military as a viable career option." Corey continued, "A little older now, it occurred to me that I have completely prejudged this. I just didn't know anything about it." This led Corey, a paraprofessional education assistant with Milwaukee Public Schools Division of Special Services, to do his own research, to read about the military and to talk to people about his options.

"Being young and capable, I wanted to do something non-conventional. I want to learn unconventional skills," explained Corey. Corey graduated from the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee with a bachelor's degree in fine arts. He had worked in a few office environments and wasn't satisfied with the life style. When asked what brought him to this decision to join the Army, Corey several times referred to the personal qualities he admired in some of the individuals he knows who have served and those he has read about. One individual he spoke highly of was Dennis Starr, the supervisor of a job he had held while attending college and the same individual for whom Jason had worked under years earlier. It was clear that Starr had made quite an impression on Corey. "Starr was the perfect example of the type of individual I hoped to become. Nothing stood in his way." Starr had served in both the Navy and the Army. He spoke highly of both experiences.

When questioned about special forces, what led Corey and Jason to pursue that MOS, Corey quickly responded. “No one goes out for a sport to ride the bench. You go out to be part of the best. Special forces soldiers have a reputation for being the best and I can’t believe it is unwarranted. I know I am not guaranteed a spot on special forces but I plan to give it my best shot.” In admiration, Corey described special forces as “the cream of the crop, the edge of the sword.”

Shipping Out

Their plan was to complete special forces training together. Now, however, Corey would ship out alone but with his brother’s full support. Should Corey have felt guilty about pursuing this dream despite his brother’s disappointment, Jason would not permit it. Though terribly disappointed that the LASIK surgery would disqualify him from special forces at this point in the process, he remained very positive and steadfast in his desire to serve in the Army. Jason worked with the Shorewood Recruiting Station, Milwaukee Company, to review his options. He left for basic training a week later prepared to do what it takes to become an Army Ranger. Sergeant John Harper, a recruiter with Shorewood Recruiting Station and a Ranger himself, expressed his confidence that Jason would achieve this goal. “He’s got the drive.”

As with most things in life, the Baumgardners’ pursuit of special forces did not go according to plan. Jason’s disappointment was a challenge to their commitment to serve. But, they met this challenge without complaint and remain determined. It was through this experience that the Army got its first taste of what these two brothers offer the service and why they are sure to find their place among the best.

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